CHAPTER – VI

HIS TECHNIQUE OF FICTION WRITING

Self-revelation is a cruel process. It involves the labour pains of childbirth. In order to catch in words a flux of thoughts and emotions moving forward and backward, wobbling upward and downward and skipping side ways, one has to be hard and ruthless, because there are ten different faces reflecting in ten different mirrors at one and the same time. One has to be very cautious because the mirror is always treacherous, it shows you only what you want to see, and others see in you what they want to see.

Writing about the inner world of a man is like looking through the eyehole of a magic peep show and watching many bits and pieces arranged in a multi-colored patchwork. In order to write about the inside of one’s mind, one has to detach and distance from ones own self; one has to separate one’s experience and the awareness of that experience, and then one has to shift out and window away the irrelevant facts. The novelist writes about the problems which one has to face in penning down the inside stories of his/her characters. It is important to select the subject of the expression but more important is the selection of way or the devices to put forth his subject, ideas and language creatively.

A reader experiences this pleasure in two ways – haphazardly as a layman has it and methodically as a trained man does. Former has its worth as vague or even confused while the latter remains accounted for. It is the latter mode, which requires aesthetic or critical tools to analyze and relish literature. Some scholars may think that to relish literature, there is no need of critical tools. They hold that the application of critical tools to
a piece of literature hampers the aesthetic experience because the scholar is lost in the mechanical enquiry. This objection, no doubt, has logic for the reader who is not a trained reader or who is not used to applying such tools to a literary piece. For a trained reader this objection has no value because for him such an application to a piece of literature is not a mechanical task but an assimilative factor of reading and enjoying that piece of literature.

People often enjoy literature before they understand it because certain words or phrases may appeal to them or they may get a general impression of the meaning of a piece of literature and like it. But a trained reader reads a piece of literature most carefully before he/she understands enough to enjoy it. If he/she is simply bewildered by a piece of literature, he/she cannot enjoy it. On this basic level, therefore, enjoyment is closely related to understanding. For a trained reader, pleasure lies in the process of working out of the meaning of the piece of literature. This process of working out of the meaning of a piece of literature leads to the close study of the language of literature. For making a close study of language of literature, the reader is required to be equipped with literary tools to know the creative use of language.

The present chapter aims at analyzing the narrative techniques used by George Gissing in his works. The scientific impact is clearly visible on George Gissing’s novels, so in artistic techniques involving language, style, dialogues, narratives and settings also, his novels have been largely influenced by scientific thought. Like Mark Rutherford and George Moore, his language and style have been considerably influenced by scientific impact. After analyzing the novels, one feels that his works are social document pregnant with scientific flavor. From the point of view of the devices employed by Gissing in his works, are concerned with literary
presentation of the scientific philosophies. The present chapter aims at concentrating the narrative devices used by Gissing.

Gissing’s early novels raise two interesting issues for a post formalist approach to literature. The first has to do with the relationship between literary quality and documentary value in a work of fiction. Here the fundamental problem is to do justice with the documentary evidences as well as maintaining their literary values. The Second theoretical issue governing Gissing’s earlier novels viz *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), *Demos* (1886), *Isabel Clarendon* (1886), *Thyrza* (1887) and *The Nether World* (1889) is the relationship between narrative and ideology. Gissing has been quite successful in using these two elements in his novels as “a form of discourse, and particularly to the realistic social novel.” (Jameson, 128)

Gissing chooses philanthropism - the nostrum for the problems of working class by upper class as an ideological framework for *Workers in the Dawn* and *Thyrza*. In *Isabel Clarendon* a combination of rural radicalism, female beauty of worship and Paterian aestheticism weave the ideological pattern. However, the ideological framework seems to crumble under the strain of myriad issues, which the novelist tries to handle.

*Demos (1886)*, was intended to be a story of socialism but it suffers in its purpose except for its long descriptive passages and diatribes on socialism and democracy. In *Demos* the canvas is enormous and the characters a multitude. As the narrative progresses it becomes instead of a story of socialism the story of one woman. The figure of Adela Mutimer - a girl married by the wish of her family to an artisan monopolizes more and more the reader’s anxiety, until at length the question of her happiness or misery dwarfs all else. She becomes more powerful in
sacrifice in a scene in which she compels her husband to desist from crime. She prefers to be wife of a simple mechanic rather than someone given to an act of felony.

Demos has another point of particular interest in that the pivot turns chiefly upon the differences which separate class from class. Many novelists have dealt with the consequences of a marriage between persons of unequal birth, but none has brought to the consideration of the matter that wide and exact documentary knowledge of caste and that broad outlook which mark Gissing’s conceptions. His philosophy seems to be that of social distinctions have profounder influences upon the general human destiny than is commonly thought. Generally there is a tendency to accept the fundamental similarity underlying the superficial dissimilarity of the social grades.

Gissing’s earlier novels follow the realistic device in structural design, which is different from the classical realist novel. John Sloan rightly observes: “Gissing’s work ideologically presents its liberation from the ‘declassing’ structures of the classic realist novel, from the need for personal integration with a decisive social world.”(Sloan, 10) There is no former accommodation of the kind of disintegration of society within the self that is found, in the works of Henry James and the modernists. He is aware of his social marginality and increasingly organized and oppressive industrial orders. Gissing is constrained to subvert classic realistic conventions in seeking to represent the conditions of his class and times.

Most of Gissing’s early novels refer specifically to his static and finally fatalistic vision of human misery and oppression, as well as his absolute distinction between culture and progress. The earlier novels neatly fall into two distinct categories melodramatic and sentimental as
we see in *Thyrza* and plain journalistic reportage as we see in *Workers in the Dawn* and *Demos*. Gissing in his early novels, before nineties, seems to have taken a style of journalistic reportage. His narrative follows long and rambling passages describing minutely everything, which the new naturalists of 1880s and 1890s did under the influence of Zola. Clarence R. Decker comments: “Naturalism is not new: all great artists - Homer, Phidias, and Goethe interpreted nature. The Old Naturalism, however, is poetical, moral; the new naturalism is scientific, materialistic, and atheistic.”(Decker, 90) The influence of Zola on Gissing can be seen in Gissing’s early novel. This emphatic comment in *The Daily Telegraph* on Zola also explains this tendency in Gissing’s early novels:

Descriptive details, personal details, business details ad nauseum, exuberant ... furnish Mr. Zola with materials for the paddling out of his story to unconscionable dimensions” and the *Daily* further adds: “No body wants to read elaborate biography and psychological analysis of a journalist ... (Zola, 98)

Gissing’s journalistic reportage of the working class life, poverty, slums come from his own observations of reality. The tightly controlled and authentic 31, 54, 95 scenes of *Demos* and 14, 96 of *Thyrza* were possible only after a painstaking study of his chosen subject: “I rambled till midnight about the filthy little courts and back yard and alleys, and stumbled over strange species of humanity.”(Gissing, 31)

While toiling fearfully over the construction of *Thyrza*, he was worried because the actual writing was delayed while he gathered more material. “I have to go over a hat factory, a lumatic asylum, and other strange places, also to wander much in slums.”(Gissing, 179) During the same period he wrote to his sister,
I am living at present in Lambeth doing my best to get at the meaning of that strange world, so remote from our civilization.... I have the strangest people and scenes floating in my mind. Tomorrow, a Bank Holiday, I must spend in the street; there is always much matter to be picked up on such days. (Gissing, 182)

Gissing continued, throughout the eighties “to gather details of working class speech and behavior which he used to give a sense of sociological and scientific exactitude to his novels.” (Algernon, 187) It is his faith in the scientific observation of working class life that sets him apart from earlier writers. The development of Gissing’s artistic and social views in the eighties, as reflected in his fine working class novels, is extremely complex. The complexity evolves out of interplay of vast canvas, multiple characters and episodes, which often overburden the structure of the plots causing ennui.

The plot structure of early novels consists of several sub plots, myriad episodes and lengthy descriptive passages. *Workers in the Dawn* is replete with such numerous sub-plots viz. ‘Norman – Arthur’ where the focus is on the working class life and environment, Mr. Wiffle all his son Augustus, sub-plot where Augustus’s development as a Villain of the story has been conceived. The ‘Arthur-Helen’ sub-plot may be seen as a sequel to the main plot but it stands apart, if we see it in terms of Carrie Mitchell’s relations to Arthur and her fall as a degenerate Woman. Moreover, those parts of the novel in which occur the long speeches and discussions on philosophy, ethics and art seem to have diverted from the main plot. Besides there is a vast array of characters to which an unsigned review in *Manchester Examiner and Times* rightly referred: “... there are
many more characters than were required for its proper
development.” (Manchester, 3)

The lengthy descriptive passages and vast physical details which
are also to be found in George Eliot and Dickens’s novels are to be also
seen in Gissing’s earlier novels. However whereas in George Eliot and
Dickens these are kept alive with humor in Gissing these create a sense of
repulsion due to extremely dry humour and depressing tone. Describing
the inhibitions in *Workers in the Dawn* he says: “Litany Lane was a
narrow passage, with houses on the one side . . . There were two or three
dirty little shops, filthy stairs exhibiting dusty passages.” (Gissing, 267)
Here the environment seems to be suffocating and that of repulsion. The
description of ‘gin-shop’ in this novel where Gissing describes “young
men and women, all half drunk mauling each other with the caresses, and
so foams forth, abomination and horrible blasphemy which bespeaks the
very depth of human-ayea bestial degradation.” (Gissing, 141) Describing
the dwellings of the workers, he further says they “inhabit dens which
clean animals would shun.” (Gissing, 9)

The narrative creates an effect of virulence by such descriptions
and as we move to latter working class novels the virulence seems to be
fading out and a plain journalistic style follows. P.J. Keating too
comments: “In the latter novels that follow, working class districts are
often portrayed in a plain journalistic style, as though directly transcribed
from note - book jotting.”(Keating, 60)

*Thyrza* (1887) is different from Gissing’s other working class
novels notably *Demos, The Unclassed*. Here Gissing takes more mild
aspect of working class life for its thematic structure. The novel has two
plots running parallel to each other. The main plot consists of
development of Thyrza’s character, her love for Egremont, a man
superior to her in class, and her subsequent trial of love and finally death. The second plot has been built around the theme of philanthropism and its futility. This is reflected in the character of Egremont, an industrialist who comes to Lambeth to emancipate the working classes through education by organizing contact classes. The failure of Egremont’s programme like that of Helen’s in *Workers in the Dawn* has been observed by Gissing as their idealistic approach to a complex problem. And Egremont realizes the futility of his philanthropism towards the end of the novel. The rather facile acceptance of individual philanthropy, which spoils the ending of *The Unclassed*, has been abandoned in *Thyrza*. Besides the snobbishness of Demos is held in abeyance and long, vague slum descriptions of *Workers in the Dawn* are replaced by brief sketches of photographic exactness. Thus the Paradise Street: The nature is less descriptive than it might be. Poor dwellings, mean and cheerless, are interspersed with factories and one or two small shops a public house in prominent, and a railway arch break the perspective of the rough fare midway.’(25)

To this simple outline there are added detail and images of working class life, so that the street becomes a reality by virtue of the activity of its inhabitants. The busy market place, the gossiping house wives, the sounds of church bell and the street vendors, the music and dancing and the voices of married couples quarrelling when the pub turns out, are all used to bind together the complex class structure of the novel. The subdued tone of *Thyrza* comes largely from an increasingly skilful use of the material of everything life. There is an attempt to see working class life as something other than a social disease.

In *Thyrza* the street scenes no longer excite disgust and no longer is there emphasis simply on the debauchery of the streets. The role that
music plays in the novel is a good example of his changing technique. The children dance to a barrel organ in the street and Gissing sees the vulgar yet emotional music as symbolizing “The half-conscious striving of a nature which knows not what it would attain.” (112) Old Mr. Body plays the violin in his shabby room, and will doubtless remembered by future generations for this idiosyncrasy, just as Matthew Trent is remembered in Paradise street for his fine voice. As Thyrza and Lydia sit looking out of the window on a Sunday afternoon they hear the strains of Mr. Jarmey’s accordion playing a selection of tunes varying from popular hymnody to the familiar ditties of the music hall. Thyrza herself sings at a Friendly Lead, in the Prince Albert to a rapturous and relatively sober reception and latter Annabel’s piano playing is such that Thyrza had never imagined existing in the beautiful home of Mrs. Ormond. Throughout the novel music symbolizes both the passion and calm of the story, and the tensions of the earlier novels seem to have vanishing in the harmony of the music. This technique marks a note of improvement above his earlier novels.

In Isabel Clarendon (1886) which preceded Gissing’s working class novel Thyrza discussed earlier, it is the novel’s claim for the moralizing and humanizing effects of literature which underlie its central structuring metaphor of ‘Society as a stage.’ It is a motif, which arises in part from the Romantic tradition that material world is illusion, and only the spiritual world is the reality. Here the vision of life as a series of roles is one, which supports Kingkote’s (hero) refusal to play the working gentleman. Isabel for instance, objects to Rhoda Meres, the daughter of an impoverished literary man, going on stage as a place for the unsuccessful ones who have lost their place in society, but in expressing a
conventional view, she appears to miss the ironic light it throws on her own position.

A consciousness of the irony emerges on her relationship with her word, Ada Warren. Ada who is Claredon’s illegitimate daughter, is the living accusation of the ‘refined insincerity’ of her marriage without love: “That I should take the child and rear it to inherit his property or else lose everything at once with a woman of self respect, that I would rather suffer through years, be the talk of pity and contempt of every one, face at last the confession to her all that rather than be poor again.”(112) Her punishment lies in the awareness of her dependence on material things, a dependence which threatens her concept of her ideal self. The wound is opened by Lancour. (Isabel Clarendon, 283-84)

Lancour also wants to go on stage. His theatre largely remains the society itself. The shift is from man as an essence to man as an actor. This motif is powerful till Kingcote refuses the theatre of the world in his search for and assertion of his essential self towards the end of the novel. One of the interesting aspects of the novel’s ending is the degree to which it exposes the absence of an autonomous place or function for the emergent intellectual such as Kingcote in the advancing industrial world of late nineteenth century.

Isabel Clarendon is different from Gissing’s other earlier novels in the compositeness of plot and execution of the design. It is primarily a novel of ideas as it has been pointed out earlier but here the presentation of the hero is different from the intellectual heroes of Workers in the Dawn, The Unclassed and Thyrza, John Sloan rightly points out: “Isabel Clarendon is a novel of ideas in which the intellectual hero is presented for the first time in Gissing’s work not as disinherited or ‘déclassé’, but as
a distinctively male version Charlotte Bronte’s cultured, petty bourgeois, protagonist.” (Sloan, 15-28)

Gissing, in *The Nether World*, comes to an unromantic and unemotional plot device. Thus *The Nether World*, if it has documentary value at all is best used as testimony not on the state of Victorian slums but rather on the narrative structure in which representation of the “imaginary relationship of the individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Sloan, 38) has been depicted.

In *The Nether World* separate narratives are connected by a chain of crude Coincidences. There are a dozen wistful tragedies of which the story loses itself periodically in a maze of episodes each interrupting others. Arnold Bennett says: “the canvas is as large as that of Anna Karenina a dozen exquisite moving renunciations with their accompanying brutalities and horror ... affect are weakened by a too much impartial diffusion of the author’s imaginative power.” (Altherssar, 162)

The novel is an interesting example of ‘generic discontinuity.’ (724-6) Its intertwining narrative stands or generic keys separable precisely according to the melodramatic, sentimental opposition evoked. Thus when Clara aspires to leave her station in life to rise in society not only is the attempt marked negatively by the questionable moral status of the activity as an actress but Gissing seems to add his own comments in the form of narrative judgment when Clara’s rival throws acid on her face out of jealousy.

The novel’s imagery and narrative paradigms of entrapments serve what Frederic Jameson has characterized as a mystification and legitimating of existing social arrangement. The strength lies to some extent in the self-exemptions of the narrative voice itself.
The classical references, the generalizations of working class faults, self-dramatizing of *Demos*, *Workers in the Dawn* have been kept aside in *The Nether World*. There is nothing in the actual narration of the collective voice of the city or the people, nothing of Zola’s *L’Assommoir*, which was an attempt to avoid the prejudices and attitudes presented in the language of his own class. The use of classical references in *The Nether World* particularly in the ‘Saturnalia’ sequence which describes the bank holiday outing to the Crystal Place not only indicates that Gissing is not only writing for working people but he has distinct voice. (Jameson, 127)

One of the characteristics of Gissing is that he builds plots not only on the life of a particular character and his subsequent development from childhood to the last phase. He takes society as a whole for the structural design as Arnold Bennett would see it. “He sees the world not bit by bit a series of isolation but broadly in the vast wholes.” (Gapp, 160) In *Born in Exile* (1892) Gissing weaves the central plot around Peak’s character, his childhood, his subsequent development of social and moral values, his agnosticism and finally his catastrophe. Needless to say all these developments cannot be seen in isolation from the society. The central focus is on the society as a whole. Similarly in *The Odd Women* (1893) the whole business of structural design and its execution rests on a group of women represented by Rhoda Nunn and Miss Barfoot rather than any individual. Within this, the structure has been encompassed many of the questions of women’s life and their social, economic and moral problems.

H.G. Wells writing on structural design of Gissing’s novels maintains that “earlier novels were exercises in setting stories on moral intentions around the life of an individual.’ He further adds that: “... from Fielding to Jane Austen there was a tendency to weave the structure
around the individual spirit, story at times plots collapsing under the weight of character.’ Wells also pointed out in the same essay “Gissing is the first English novelist to discard the curse of plots with new methods.” About Gissing, he further argued about novels “which are neither study of character essentially not essentially series of incidents but deliberate attempt to present in typical groupings distinct phases of our social orders.”(Bennett, 363)

H. G. Well’s analysis of Gissing’s structural devices, its innovativeness is true to the latter novels of Gissing. Wells’ emphasis of Gissing’s technique of taking groups or society as a whole for the structure in many of his novels is particularly true. This device serves two purposes. First, it provides multi-dimensions to the narrative and secondly it makes the central theme more clear and forceful. For instance in *The Nether World* Gissing takes a group of people in slums and this theme has been relentlessly pursued to the end. The effect produced in myriad viz. the problems of the slum dwellers, their violent emotions, and cool acceptance of slum reality. In totality these combine to produce the central theme i.e. the reality of slums and slum as a human trap. Actions of every character are circumscribed by it. Similarly in *The Whirlpool* and *The Odd Women* Gissing applies the above device to comment on the evils of the society and its social and moral values.

In the novels that followed *The Nether World* (1889) Gissing continued to challenge the spiritual bankruptcy of the industrial society. In *The Emancipated* (1890) which constitutes an artful, almost self deceiving pause between Gissing’s’ unflinching vision of the conditions of the people, and his thematic return to the harsh realities of urban life in *The New Grub Street* (1891). The plots were notably pitched around the
conflicts between cultural aspirations of an individual and social handicap in fulfillment of those aspirations.

_The Emancipated_ (1890) marked a remarkable change from the realistic descriptions in plain journalistic style to artistic description of broken or marred lives, ironically seeking emancipation from false ideas of religion, principles of art and false love. _The Emancipated_ for its structural design has a plot, which generally deals with, the breaking away of several young people from the creeds, tastes and prejudices of their early training. _The Emancipated_ sets out to demonstrate the inadequacy of unbridled liberalism and its subsequent effects on the people in the contrasted histories of Cecily Doran and Miriam Haske. The novel registers a moral critique of the dangerous excesses and superficiality of modern liberalism. It embodies the moral possibility of a marriage between dogma and enlightenment in Miriam’s deepening involvement with the artist, Ross Mallard. Cecily elevates the artist above “the rules by which common people must direct their lives.”(Wells, 192-201) Miriam censures the life of the artist as ‘frivolous if not something worse.’(Korg, 34) Her marriage to Mallard at the close of the novel is clearly meant to represent a synthesis of ‘sweetness and light’ that balances the enslaving excess of liberalism and ‘numbing effect of dogma.’(Korg, 266)

In _The New Grub Street_ Gissing begins by taking the longer realistic form and presents the story of the several artists namely Reardon, Biffen, Jasper through a number of sub-plots. He is able to maintain the structural amity in the depiction of the aesthetic values in the Victorian World.

In spite of the use of loose form _The New Grub Street_ attains a remarkable degree of unity. This is achieved by a convention on the
careers of handful characters, which in their relationship with each other provide a microscopic view of society. Gissing’s method relies heavily on a massive accumulation of detailed intellectual, social, conventional matters which carefully “organized and placed is used to build up a complex ironic structure.” (Korg, 262) The passage from the novel provides an insight into the real purpose of Gissing in satirizing the trade in literature. Moreover, it shows how Gissing’s authorial intervention supports the disintegration of the plot:

You scorn their passivity, but it was their merit to be passive.
Gifted with independent means, each of them would have taken quite a different aspect in your eyes. The sum of their faults was their inability to earn money, but indeed, that inability does not call for unmingled disdain. (168-69)

Here Gissing seems to strengthen the weakening motif, which encompasses a bunch of suffering and dying artists under the strain of Milvain plot. In John Goode’s view it is a passage “in which author seems to be compensating for the disintegration of the fictional structure.” (136) Gissing’s *Eve’s Ransom* (1895), *Sleeping Fires* (1895) and *The Paying Guest* (1896) mark a swift departure from Gissing’s earlier practices of novel writing with an exception to *Denzil Quarrier* (1892). In these novels the departure may be seen both in terms of structure and theme. The plots are simple and the theme is lighter. These novels are neither overburdened by ideas, too many subplots nor overcrowded with characters. Gissing presents here slices of life in a given social and cultural situations. This was viewed by reviewers as change in Gissing’s style.

In *Eve’s Ransom* Gissing builds the plot around the sufferings and fantasies of a draughtsman called Maurice Hillard and the heroine Eve
leads an austere life and he sees no prospect of ever being able to ‘gratify his taste with which he was born’, ‘life stretched before him like an arid waste’ (7) and in order to forget the miseries he begins to drink. Once he gets 400 pounds from his father’s friend it changes his life style. He is overwhelmed by the desire to satiate all his unfulfilled desires including a trip to Paris. “And what are you going to do?”, asks his friend. “I am going to live”, replies Hillard, “going to be a machine no longer. Can I call myself a man?” The plot has continuity except in the scene, which shifts from London to Paris. Here narration becomes a descriptive note of Paris’ beauty, art, and culture. The plot is again joined after Hillard’s return to London and meeting with Eve a girl who is struggling under similar circumstances. By joining these two slices of life that of Hilliard and Eve, Gissing achieves a more forceful Coherence in the plotting. These words of Hilliard may explain it better: “We seem almost face to face with those great problems that loom large before us, when every slave feels within him the possibilities of a richer life.” (103) The novel ends on a note of compromise. In its inner structure the novel that suggests a compromising attitude to life acceptance of the realities of life and living with them.

The novel does not become grim and the interest in the characters, their development does not loose its grip over the readers. As George Cotterell in his reviewed rightly commented: “Mr George Gissing, in Eve’s Ransom, writes of sad things without being pathetic, of mean circumstances without being sordid.’ (Cotterell, 427)

Sleeping Fires (1895) is a novelette where the story is direct; plot and characterization seem to be simpler. Langley and the widow, Lady Rewill loved long ago, and did not marry because she was pure hearted, and Langley; a bachelor was a father. She marries a baronet and adopts
the boy. Then in the simple way of novelettes, the father and son meet at Athens. The son dies and the widow lady Rewill marries Langely. Thus quite metaphorically the ‘sleeping fires’ of Langely is awakened in his marriage with Lady Rewills. And the end is the triumphant proclamation of the gospel of joy: ‘Health and Joy’, says Langely, the hero ‘it is what life demands of us.’(99) Here the plot is simple and story is lighter. The plot is not overburdened by too many characters. The first half of the book is occupied by three people Langely, Anges Rewill and the boy. An unsigned review referred to this novel as “original, artistic, and dramatic.”(Literary World, 117)

_The Paying Guest_ (1896) has also such simple plot. These novels thematically as well as structurally provide a relief to the readers of Gissing as his major novels demand a more serious study as an unsigned review commented: “It is a brave new venture in a new style ... with loftier themes and more attractive characters.”(261)

In _The Whirlpool_ (1897) Wells discovered a distinct turning away from the “in sufficiency of the cultivated life and its necessary insincerities to which the vivid appreciation of things as they are.”(Garnett, 352-3) It must be refuted here because Gissing does not renounce his former attachment to spacious culture, not is it simply that his heroes no longer triumph and this is true since _New Grub Street_ which on one level measures ‘impracticality of the refined ideal.’(Wells, 302) Rather that shift lies in the evident inability of the favored hero to stand for an alternative attitude or ideal that could resist the process of destruction and self-assertion in society as a whole. This is reflected in several ways, in two major novels of Gissing namely _In the Year of Jubilee_ (1894), and _The Whirlpool_ (1897), Here the focus is city and a more urban and modern life.
City life occupies a significant place in Gissing’s novels. Gissing was deeply concerned with the bewildering extensions and expansions of the city life. Raymond Williams argued that Gissing belongs with those nineteenth and twentieth century urban writers for whom the city is no longer simply a ‘generalized social scene’ but the ‘very form of modern life’, itself. (Williams, 223) Gissing sees the complexities of life increasing in the slums which were a necessary part of the newly expanding cities. He examines the consequences of rapid industrialization, which had eclipsed several of the older values. To Henry Ryecroft, “London is a great place for corruption of life and values. City becomes a setting of life full of economic struggle and social disturbances.” (Masterman, 68)

In his earlier novels the image of city is more gruesome because Gissing primarily concentrates on the suburbs and the working class life in the outskirts of the city precisely slums. In Workers in the Dawn (1880), The Unclassed (1884) and The Nether World (1889) the focus is on the filth, alleys, “dens which clean animals would shun.” (9) In these novels Gissing presents the lives of the people in the urban slums.

In his latter novels particularly in In the Year of Jubilee (1894), The Crown of Life (1899) and New Grub Street, the image of city changes. It is no longer place of mean gloomy streets where man works and sleeps. Here the focus shifts from ‘rookeries’ of earlier novels to ‘big houses’ from ‘blind alleys’ to traffic and from toiling masses to city crowd. Besides here Gissing presents relatively affluent class. The focus is mainly on the middle or upper-middle-class. The theme centers on the middle-class culture in The Whirlpool and The Paying Guest.

The Whirlpool (1897), which starts with the collapse of a fringe banking company, deals with an area of prosperous middle-class life,
which was growing in importance after about 1870 in the metropolis. The main characters, Harvey and Alma Rolfe, Sibyl and Hugh Carnaby are all renters free to choose between living on their dividends and sinking their capital in new business ventures. The beneficiaries of Victorian imperial prosperity, their restlessness is symptomatic of confusion between the old ideals of relaxed and gracious living and new ones of material opulence. Harvey hesitates between a country retreat and the life of a clubman, but becomes a joint owner of a photographic business. Alma is torn between humble domesticity and a career as a professional violinist. While Hugh Carnaby speculates in gold mining in Queens Land before becoming a Midlands manufacturer in order to support his metropolitan wife. Gissing reveals the economic insecurity and the frivolous cultural pretensions of middle-class opulence.

*The Crown of Life* (1899) presents a new basis of cosmopolitan life and its separateness from the conventional value of the society. Piers Otway’s vision of the city indicated world where the forces of oppression have become obscure, but more systematic. He sees the triumphant facade of its huge rampart street as part of a huge machine, which reduces man to a portion of an inconceivably complicated mechanism. The novel itself opposes militarism, newspaper, jingoism and hard selfishness in the cosmopolitan culture. Lee Hannaford, the inventor of new explosives, Arnold Jacks, a high bred bull dog whose religion of the empire amounts to looking after his own and other people’s dividends are parts of this system.

The characters, says John Sloan ‘conflate civilization with racial superiority but they are seen to be “unresponsive to true culture and caviling influence.”’(Sloan, 147) Jack’s soulless pursuit of dividends is continued into his private life and in practical and passionless acquisition
of a wife to civilize the drawing room. Their sterility is seen to be a symptom of a new, acquisitive power, hungry society, which channels and perverts the initial resources of man’s instinctual physical life. Here Gissing’s tone becomes satirical.

Gissing’s criticism of society, its values, political and economic system often assumes the form of a satire. Gissing’s satire is often directed against the society as a whole. He charges the battery of his satire against social and political conditions, which fail to offer solutions, to the problems of employment, housing, and poverty. *Workers in the Dawn* is an impassioned attack on Victorian ideals of progress and social reform. Gissing attacks the increasing fragmentation and specialization of social and intellectual life reflected in the frustration of the ‘declasse’ hero Arthur Golding. He attacks the failure of the middle-class heroine, Helen’s philanthropic ideal of reform through education. In *Thyrza* too Egromonte’s organization of contact classes to educate the workers in Lambeth is seen as an utter failure. Gissing sees the methods of philanthropists as nostrums for the basic problems of unemployment and poverty.

In *Demos* Gissing attacks the faults of the inhuman system of individual employers, socialism and trade unionism. He attacks the duplicity of socialist leaders in the character of Richard Mutimer whose life exposes the dichotomy between the public life and the personal life of such leaders. He criticizes the violence to which political meetings have turned. The ‘New Wanley Scheme’ itself is offered as a satirical exposure of the egoism that directs the democratic fervor, and the moral and aesthetic poverty of working class aims.(Sloan, 63) In *Demos* Gissing’s satire is also directed against the “working class aims and capacities.”(Letters to Algernon, 172) Gissing shows that Trade unions
don’t have specific plans and programmes except forcing the employers through strikes to give small piecemeal satisfaction. In Dennzil Quarrier (1892) Gissing satirises electioneering and parliamentary elections. On the one side he attacks the duplicity of character in hero Denzil Quarrier, on the other side in the villain, Glazzard he satirises the role of propaganda in such elections. Glazzard brings the illicit relationship of Quarrier with Lilian as a political weapon to malign the image of Denzil, a candidate for Parliamentary election. Glazzard makes it an issue to score a political point.

In The New Grub Street Gissing’s satire is directed against the commercialization of art through Reardon and Jasper Milvain. Gissing attacks the very trade in literature. The difference between the two persons is that absolute distinction between the aesthetic and commercial value of literature. Gissing makes it the central motif of this novel to attack commercialism in art. Besides in Milvain’s and Amy Reardon’s characters Gissing attacks the absolute moral degradation, spiritual bankruptcy and the illusory nature of freedom in the industrial society of materialistic world.

In the year of Jubilee Gissing presents the satirical account of lower, middle-class-life in Camberwell a satirical presentation of one corner—the consumer end of the ‘vast inhuman metropolis.’ The viciousness and spurious gentility of Peachy household the hysterical emphasis of the Morgan family on educational success, the vulgarity of the advertising agent, Luckworth Crewe, unrolling the future in his ‘colored picture of white sand pier’ through a series of pen portraits, Gissing constructs a vision of complete cultural collapse that has a close thematic relationship with The Nether World and The New Grub Street.
In *The Odd Women* Gissing attacks the very institution of marriage and the failure of the society itself, Rhoda Nunn, the central figure is a spinster. Like many of her real life counterparts, Rhoda emphasises that it is a woman’s right to choose a professional carrier instead of marriage. As John Sloan has rightly commented, “Oddness for Rhoda is no longer a statistical definition but a posture for combat in a world of inauthentic sexual relationships.” (Sloan, 122)

Gissing also attempts to satirize the narrowness of the feminist movement. Rhoda represents that attempt on the part of the new women to break away from the narrow concern of the feminist movement in England with the problem of single women, and from its assumption that marriage is woman’s natural profession. (Adams, 77)

One of the basic purposes of Gissing’s satire in *The Whirlpool* is the expression of economic insecurity and cultural pretensions of the middle class. Hervey, Alma, Hugh Carnaby, and Sibyl are caught into the whirlpool which metaphorically suggests vision of blockage and desire which arises at the intersection of the social and personal worlds, and above all in the institution of modern marriage.” (Parrinder, xiv)

*Will Warburton* (1905) is a satire on middle-class snobbery. Gissing achieves this end through Willwarburton and Rosamund the heroine who under the veil of her soft and subtle refinement of bearing is an odious young person. Warburton is a partner in a wholesale West India sugarhouse who through his mismanagement of his partner Willbarburton meets financial crashes. He is forced to take to grocery for living concealing the facts from his friend Norbert Franks, an artist groaning over his lack of success and whom Warburton helps to prosperity and fame. Quite ironically he gets everything Warburton looses money, refined surroundings and the esteem of the applause of the world.
Gissing attacks the snobbery of Warburton who ashamed of his profession of grocery carries on the business under an assumed name and belies to his friends and fiancé. Willwarburton is the type of Englishman, modest but timidly self-conscious, high principled generously self-sacrificing but morbidly reserved and full of self-distrust a type of snob which we see in Peak (*Born in Exile*), Edward Garnett in a letter to Gallsworthy wrote: “Gissing’s last novel about a middle-class man who looses his capital and turns a grocer is a very clever satire on English ideals.”(Garnett, 352-3)

Another aspects, which Gissing satirizes, are the middle-class pretentions about love which in reality is materialistic in its fervor. Rosamund when discovers that Willwarburton has lost his fortune and he is actually a shop-keeper in Brompton -road she promptly makes up her mind to marry Franks whom she had earlier deserted for Will. Gissing penetrates into the weakness and follies of the middleclass society and his power of ‘Quiet Satire’ is quite powerful. One of the characteristics of Gissing’s satire is “to bring home to the people the ghastly condition (material, mental and moral) of the people to show, the hideous injustice of our whole system of the society.”(Letters, 184)

Gissing in his earlier novels follows Dickens in the basic structure of his novels. Nevertheless, he seems to have made certain artistic revision of certain key elements in Dickens’ work that for a picture truer to the aggravated conditions of later phase of social and intellectual life. Here Gissing shares a closer affinity with Dostoevsky. The clue to this affinity is in fact found in Gissing’s *Critical Study* of Dickens where he compares Dickens with Dostoevsky. This excerpt is particularly revealing: “Dostoevsky’s master piece, Crime and Punishment, abounds in Dickens-like touches in its lighter passages. Extravagance of characters
delighted him, and he depicted them with a freer hand than Dickens was permitted or would have carried to use.” (Gissing, 222-23) The similarity between Gissing and Dostoevsky in the plot device rests on the “shared images of expression, individual freedom and moral and intellectual revolt, at their unique and distinctly English representation.” (Sloan, 443)

It should be noted that Gissing to some extent plays down the expression and mimetic aspects of literary composition and development in his study as a whole. Gissing was writing after all in a period of intense literary self-consciousness in the England of the nineties. More significantly his whole approach to Dickens was based not on critical impressions but on the consideration of a practicing novelist whose own place in literature has been achieved by a whole sale refashioning of the Victorian novel of sentiment and melodrama.

Gissing’s development as a novelist was a consequence of his abandonment of the strategies of romance. In *The Nether World* (1889), for instance, written towards the end of 1880s, Jane Snowdon, one of the genuinely poor and down trodden of Gissing’s sacrificial heroines who lack any power of reconciliation aims destructive abysses of lower-class London. Indeed it was Gissing’s refusal to provide agreeable aftertastes that provoked accusations of dreariness and gloomy realism. Even from critic like Edith Sichel who recognised Gissing’s pessimism was a more courageous response to the realities of the age than the consolations of Walter Besant’s philanthropic romances of the East End. (Sichel, 114) Significantly, some of Dostoevsky’s Russian critics also complained, he enjoyed creating, “wretched, unhappy creatures.” (Macpike, 92)

Gissing’s novels towards the close of the century particularly *The Crown of Life* (1899) and *Town Traveller* (1898) not only lack in realism but these simply mark the retreat to happy ending which is characteristic
of Dickens and seen in Gissing’s novels in 1895 and 1896. In *The Crown of Life* Irene Derwent who took a long time of eight years making up her mind and even engaged herself to another young man in the meanwhile. The society whose barrenness and dehumanizing pursuit of money and power Gissing sets out to expose gets exaggerated. The novel concludes with a return to romance ending characteristic of Dicken’s novel.

*The Town Traveller* has the cheerful story of the lower-middleclass English life, and the scene is laid in Dicken’s London. It not only occupied with the classes of society with whom Dickens successfully dealt but also even with situations, individuals, and methods. About Mr. Gammon, Mrs. Bubb, Clovers and Polly, and mysterious Greencicre are a glamour, which is foreign to tone, atmosphere and style of Gissing’s novels in the late eighties and early nineties.

Gissing’s refuge in these last works is in the pragmatism. This is significant for the evident weakness of these latter works, in their indulgent idealizing stress. This would seem to support the present view that it is Gissing’s Challenging revisions of Dickens idealistic motif that marks his major studies of suffering, intellectual exile and complexities of modern civilization.

In *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903) the narrative structure is more simplified. Narrated in the first person ‘I’, the novel reads like an autobiographical text. It has been widely evaluated as autobiographical novel by critics contemporary to Gissing as well as by modern critics. (Frye, 42) However, to say that Ryecroft is a perfection of Gissing’s fantasies, as Tindall and Pool assert the critics have offered a variety of descriptions of its surface structure ranging from ‘memoir’, ‘pansies’ to ‘confession’ and ‘meditation. The preface itself refers to the private papers as reminiscence.
John Halperien, by pointing out many correspondences between Ryecroft and Gissing’s other writings comes to the conclusion that in Ryecroft “The pretence of fiction is dropped altogether, what we have is a novel, as a spiritual confession as private memoir.”(A Life in Books, 315) A gross comparison between Gissing’s private papers with Ryecroft reflects that the autobiographical elements cannot be ruled out but it needn’t be overstressed. Gissing himself wrote of Ryecroft: “The thing is much more aspiration than a memory. I hope too much will not be made of the few autobiographical papers in the book.”(Letters, 135)

The structure is simple and the style is lucid. It consists of a sense of reminiscences written in Devonshire country by a man of fifty-four years named Henry Ryecroft. Like other mortals he had lived and labored, like other mortals he has entered into the rest, says Gissing in the preface which contains the biographical sketch of the man be prefers to describe as his dead friend. However, as the narrative precedes it unfolds many evils of poverty, its crushing effects, and commercialization of art, loneliness and alienation of a man caused by materialistic culture in a metropolis. The story is plain, clear and undramatic. Ryecroft himself sums up his sufferings, struggle in these words”: “My life has been merely tentative, a series of false starts and hopeless beginnings.”(Ryecroft, 103)

The plot becomes clear in the very preface where Gissing describes him as miserably poor, in failing health: “Naturally a man of independent rather scornful outlook; suffered much from defeated ambition, did a lot of hack work till, long and hard struggle with unkindly circumstances he ended his life one of defeated.”(Ryecroft, i-ii) The tone never fades into the sufferings and struggle of Ryecroft but keeps the reader spell bound in the narration of the story till the end of the novel.
Gissing’s narrative fiction viewed as an aggregate of motivated units elements of characters plot devices, descriptive features, ideological framework seem to be essentially Dickensinian in his early and last two novels *Town Traveller* and *The Crown of Life* (1899) while other novels discussed above either mark departure to new forms or seem to be revising Dickens. Gissing came only gradually to an effective dramatic portrayal of crisis within the social and psychic domain. Undoubtedly, his narrative technique suits the raw materials he chooses to describe.
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